

Congress of the United States
Washington, DC 20515

October 1, 2020

Secretary Sonny Perdue
U.S. Department of Agriculture
1400 Independence Avenue, SW
Washington, D.C. 20250

Administrator Pam Miller
USDA Food and Nutrition Service
1320 Braddock Place
Alexandria, VA 22314

Via electronic correspondence.

Dear Secretary Perdue and Administrator Miller:

We believe you should make full use of the broad authorities granted to you in Congress's comprehensive COVID-19 relief bills and the recently passed continuing resolution to extend child nutrition flexibilities through the end of Fiscal Year 21, and utilize the authority to access such sums as are necessary in order to ensure that our children have access to nutritious food. Such authorities are crucial tools in preventing school nutrition programs from becoming more financially untenable. Your use of these authorities will also assist in funding administrative, food and supplies, meal service, and delivery costs to keep pace with the increased need for such expenditures.

Between February and August of this year, an estimated 11 million jobs were lost, and a study estimates that 8 to 15 million children lived in a household that was unable to afford food resulting in these children not eating enough throughout the day.^[1] Families are struggling to put food on the table, and even brief periods of food insecurity can cause long-term developmental, psychological, physical, and emotional harm. Due to massive job losses and the ongoing economic recession, schools across the nation expect a drastic increase in the need for traditional school meal programs. Notably, 70 percent of NSLP-participating schools are federally mandated to require individual enrollment. Processing the added enrollment applications will be a struggle for the already overworked, under-resourced staff at our nation's schools. Schools around the country face enormous logistical and operational challenges as they begin the school year, especially as they must also purchase Personal Protective Equipment (PPE), increase access to pick up sites, and travel to reach more children. School staff should be able to focus on educating and feeding students as safely as possible, not worrying about processing and adjudicating school meal applications or whether they will have sufficient funds to continue to serve their communities' children.

Maintaining school meal flexibilities will alleviate the burdensome administrative paperwork and costs of these programs, allowing administrators to focus on getting healthy, nutritious food to children and allocating finite resources to those most in need. Additionally, school closures mean

^[1] [“Six Signs that the Labor Market Remains in Trouble.”](#) Chad Stone. Center on Budget and Policy Priorities (CBPP). September 4, 2020. [“More Relief Needed to Alleviate Hardship | Households Struggle to Afford Food, Pay Rent, Emerging Data Show.”](#) Sharon Parrott, Arloc Sherman, Joseph Llobrera, Alicia Mazzara, Jennifer Beltrán, and Michael Leachman. CBPP. July 21, 2020.

that these programs are also losing revenue that typically maintain their costs, such as a-la-carte options and federal reimbursements for the meals supplied. For example, Florida's Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services (FDACS) estimates that, due to COVID-19, Florida school lunch providers face \$262 million in sale and reimbursement losses.^[2] This is a national challenge, as a May 2020 School Nutrition Association survey found over 90 percent of school nutrition program administrators expect or are uncertain regarding financial deficits and that their finances are a top concern.^[3] We believe it is critical that the waivers and flexibilities are extended through the entire 2021 fiscal year immediately, so that schools can plan for the rest of the year.

In order to ensure children have access to nutritious meals, we believe the USDA should immediately extend school meal program flexibilities and use authorized funds from Congress to resolve and prevent deep deficits for school districts and for state and local governments who are already experiencing serious strains on their budgets due to dwindling revenue. These are unprecedented times, and we must ensure that we protect our children from food insecurity in the immediate and long-term.

We look forward to working with you on this important matter.

Sincerely,



Alcee L. Hastings
Member of Congress

//s//

Darren Soto
Member of Congress

//s//

Ted Deutch
Member of Congress

//s//

Al Lawson
Member of Congress

//s//

Val B. Demings
Member of Congress

^[2] [FDACS Report: \\$262 Million in COVID-19 Losses for Florida School Lunch Providers](#). Press Release. Florida Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services (FDACS). August 21, 2020.

^[3] [SNA Survey Reveals COVID-19 School Meal Trends, Financial Impacts](#). Press Release. School Nutrition Association. May 18, 2020.

//s//

Donna E. Shalala
Member of Congress

//s//

Frederika S. Wilson
Member of Congress

//s//

Kathy Castor
Member of Congress

//s//

Charlie Crist
Member of Congress

//s//

Debbie Mucarsel-Powell
Member of Congress

//s//

Lois Frankel
Member of Congress

//s//

Stephanie Murphy
Member of Congress